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‘BE IMITATORS OF ME’: PAUL’S MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

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Summary

In a number of letters, Paul urges his readers to imitate certain examples. The principal models are those of himself, Christ and God, but he also directs the attention of his readers to the behaviour of other individuals, and occasionally reminds them of the example of other churches. In addition to these injunctions to be imitators, there are also exhortations that his readers become ‘models’ for others to imitate. It would seem that both to imitate appropriate examples and to be an example to others are commendable characteristics of the Christian life. In recent years, questions have been asked regarding the motivation behind Paul’s use of these injunctions. This article seeks to reconsider the relevant Pauline texts and evaluate the author’s use of the mimesis motif.

I. Introduction

The noun ‘imitator’ ([συμ]μιμητής) and its related verb ‘to imitate’ (μιμέομαι) appear rarely in the New Testament, and predominantly in the Pauline corpus.¹ To be an imitator is not an injunction which Jesus is recorded as explicitly enjoining upon his followers.² This group of

¹11 times, 8 of which are in the Pauline corpus; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 3 Jn. 1:11.

²Where Jesus is recorded as inviting ‘followers’, Paul seems to have avoided the description ‘follower’ in favour of ‘imitator’. Cf. W.J. Ong, ‘Mimesis and the Following of Christ’, *Religion and Literature* 26 (1994) 73, 75; and E. Judge, ‘The Teacher as Moral Exemplar in Paul and in the Inscriptions of Ephesus’, in D. Peterson and J. Pryor (eds.), *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honour of Archbishop Donald Robinson* (Anzea: Lancer Books, 1992) 190-91. But note also W. Michaelis’ different resolution, ‘μιμέομαι κτλ.’, *TDNT* 4 (1968) 673, who argues that ‘the μαθητής...and the μιμητής are one and the same’, and H. Cruz, *Christological Motives and Motivated Actions in Pauline Paraenesis* (European University Studies; Frankfurt: Lang, 1990) 386.

words does not appear at all in the Old Testament,³ and the verb only appears some four times in the apocryphal writings of the Septuagint.⁴ For Paul, fitting objects of imitation variously include Christ or God, himself, his colleagues, other Christians, and other churches.

The believer's 'imitation' of appropriate examples is clearly important to Paul. It is a practice which he not only commends, but it is one which he explicitly praises when it appropriately takes place (1 Thess. 1:6). Furthermore, it is a practice which he himself exemplifies—thus, 'Be imitators of me, *as I am of Christ*' (1 Cor. 11:1). Given the importance placed by Paul on this motif, it is significant that it has received relatively little attention either by scholars or ministers.⁵

³Michaelis, 'μιμέομαι κτλ.', 663, fn. 7, argues that the notion of imitation of God is alien to the Old Testament; indeed, he draws attention to the suggestion that God is explicitly held to be inimitable. W.P. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul* (Kampen: Kok, 1962) 29-41, takes a more nuanced view that the 'raw materials for the idea are present'. Later Judaism, influenced by Greek thought and witnessed in Philo, was much more content to speak of imitation.

⁴Mac. 9:23; 13:9; Wis. 4:2; 15:9. The noun μίμημα ('copy') is found in Wis. 9:8.

⁵Three major monographs dealing with the subject were published in the 1960s: W.P. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*; A. Schulz, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen: Studien über das Verhältnis der neutestamentlichen Jüngerschaft zur urchristlichen Vorbildethik* (München: Kösel, 1962); H.D. Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967). Betz locates the imitation motif in the Hellenistic Mystery cults. Since then there have been a number of short articles considering Paul's use of the motif, and monographs by E.A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Westminster: Louisville, 1991) and B. Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (Analecta Biblica; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986). E.J. Tinsley, 'Some Principles for Reconstructing a Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ', *SJT* 25 (1972) 45, notes a 'perceptible nervousness' by protestant scholars to discuss imitation with regard to Christ. More recently, this prejudice may be reinforced by a post-modern reluctance to tackle the same theme.

This Pauline motif of imitation will be the focus of this article. It will be pursued by considering not only those passages where he explicitly commends or demands imitation, but also by reviewing verses in the Pauline corpus where imitation is only indirectly sought. It may also be instructive to consider occasions where the imitation of certain individuals is seen by Paul as ill-advised. An important related dimension to this subject will lead us to consider instances in the corpus where Paul urges his readers, whether as churches or as individuals, to provide in themselves examples (τύποι) for others in turn to emulate.

II. 'Imitation' in the Pauline Corpus

It has been noted by a number of scholars that Paul is unique in the New Testament in his exhortation to imitation of *himself*, and that he explicitly urges this only when corresponding with congregations which he has founded: namely, those in Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia and Philippi.⁶ He variously exhorts these congregations to imitate him: sometimes using the 'imitate' word group (μιμέομαι, [συμ]μιμητής); sometimes by referring to himself as an example (τύπος);⁷ and sometimes in less explicit language.

In broad terms there have been three contrasting responses to analysis of the Pauline *mimesis* motif:⁸ first, imitation of Paul consists in conformity to his gospel and is used by Paul as a means of demanding obedience (Michaelis); secondly, Paul is not specific about the content of the imitation, but uses the motif as a rhetorical device to reinforce his power and thereby define his group's identity (Castelli);

⁶E. Best, *Paul and his Converts* (Sprunt lectures 1985; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 68, notes that, with regard to congregations which he has not founded, he does, nonetheless, enjoin imitation of Christ (Rom. 15:2-3).

⁷Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9.

⁸I am grateful to C.D. Agan, 'Moral Imitation in Early Christian Literature', (unpublished article), for his assessment of the scholarly treatment of the motif. E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) 66, adopts a similar analysis.

and thirdly, the focus is on emulating the self-giving humility of the apostle, and his motivation is the edification of believers (de Boer).

Where many scholars have responded to the earlier studies by Michaelis and de Boer, few have answered Castelli's conclusions. She approaches the subject from a Foucauldian post-structuralist perspective with the premises that truth is relative, the recovery of authorial intent is impossible, and texts have a coercive force on social relations—a text should be analysed for its effect, rather than its meaning.⁹ She argues that Paul's use of *mimesis* language is entirely consistent with its wider use evident in Graeco-Roman sources; namely, that it is a tool of social control to promote 'sameness'.¹⁰ Consequently, to interpret such instructions as simple ethical injunctions not only fails to grasp the deeper content which would have been plain to a first-century reader but also ignores the power dynamic which is latent.¹¹

It is not intended in the course of this paper to undertake a detailed critique of Castelli's method,¹² but by looking again at Paul's repeated references to exemplary behaviour in himself *and* others,¹³

⁹Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 24, argues that the Pauline letters should be regarded as 'a site at which power is negotiated, brokered, or inscribed—or even as a record of the conflict'.

¹⁰Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 15, 119-21.

¹¹Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 16-17. She coins the phrase 'fallacy of self-evidence', and criticises (23) those who assume 'the transparency of textual reference while remaining silent on the question of the interestedness of the text'.

¹²For a critical assessment of Castelli's use of Foucauldian theory see A.C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation, and Promise* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995) 140-44, and S. Gathercole, *The Influence on New Testament Studies of Post-Structuralism with Special Reference to John Dominic Crossan and Elizabeth Castelli* (unpublished B.A. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1996). Also Agan, 'Moral Imitation in Early Christian Literature', writes: 'In the final analysis, Castelli's critique reads more as a critique of modern society...than of Paul's theology, and she assumes rather than justifies her hermeneutic of suspicion. One must grant her presupposition that power-hungry authority figures often employ rhetoric to advance their own ends; it is not as clear that one must grant her presupposition that Paul was (consciously or not) a wolf in shepherd's clothing'.

¹³*Cf.* Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 66, where, not expressly with regard to Castelli, he notes the difficulty when the scope of examples is limited.

we shall see that her understanding of the texts is a clear misreading of their context, and that rather than occluding the 'ethical' element of his injunctions, this constituent of the motif remains most apparent.

1. 1 Thessalonians

An important starting point for our study is to observe one of the earliest extant occurrences in the Pauline corpus of this motif, namely in the Thessalonian correspondence. In a letter in which Paul strongly and repeatedly commends his readers for their Christian lives (*cf.* 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:6; 4:10), he additionally commends them for their imitation of him and his life.

You know what kind of men we proved to be (οἱ οἱ ἐγενήθημεν) among you for your sake. And you became imitators (μιμηταὶ...ἐγενήθητε) of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit; so that you became an example (γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον) to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (1 Thess. 1:5b-7).

We see in these verses a cycle of example and imitation which is here explicitly stated, but proves to be a continuing theme through the first two chapters of the epistle. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1) recall for their readers and hearers their own conduct when they had earlier visited Thessalonica and founded the Christian community there. In a process which demonstrates considerable pastoral success, the writers highlight the fact that, during their evangelistic visit, they had been in their conduct a model for the Thessalonians (οἱ οἱ ἐγενήθημεν); in turn, the Thessalonians had proved to be imitators of both them and Christ (μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου); and, so successful were the Thessalonian Christians in that imitation, that, young in their faith, they also became a model (γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον) for the believers in both their local province of Macedonia in northern Greece as well as in the more

distant province of Achaia in the south. What characteristics were the Thessalonians imitating?

It is reported that the Thessalonians proved to be imitators of Jesus, the ministering apostle and his team in their *reception* of the message (δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου, 1 Thess. 1:6). The question is whether they were imitators simply by virtue of ‘receiving’ the word; or by receiving it ‘in much affliction’; or by receiving it ‘with the joy of the Holy Spirit’.¹⁴

It may be argued that they did not become ‘imitators of us and of the Lord’¹⁵ simply by virtue of receiving the word, for it is self-evident that they imitated the *Lord* in neither the fact nor the circumstances of their conversion.¹⁶ The two other lines of interpretation are that their imitation lay either in the opposition which all faced (Paul, his team, the Lord and the Thessalonians), or in the joy which accompanied that conversion.

¹⁴Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 67, notes these three options: focussing either on the participle (δεξάμενοι), or on the first adverbial phrase (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ) or on the second adverbial phrase (μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου). His conclusion is: ‘the focus of Paul’s thought is not on the “difficulties” nor even on the “acceptance of the word” but rather on the note of “joy” which has resulted in the Thessalonians becoming “an example” to others’.

¹⁵It is noted that various commentators consider καὶ τοῦ κυρίου to be a ‘self-correction’ or ‘afterthought’; see Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 91, who argues, unconvincingly, that the addition of ‘and the Lord’ is an attempt by Paul to add authority to his message.

¹⁶E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1972) 77, ‘Paul does not elsewhere confine imitation of himself to the period of initial Christian decision’. Best nonetheless argues that the imitation is in the manner, albeit not the fact, of conversion, namely in the context of suffering; but he notes the associated difficulty that ‘Christ did not receive the word’, *op. cit.*, 78.

A number of commentators¹⁷ limit the Thessalonians' imitation to the element highlighted in the first of the adverbial phrases, namely oppression from without.¹⁸ It is clear from 1 Thessalonians 1:6 that they had accepted the gospel in the face of much pressure (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ) (cf. 2 Thess. 1:4). Later in the epistle, Paul reminds them not only that he also had persevered in preaching the gospel to them despite great opposition (ἐν πολλῷ ὀγῶνι, 1 Thess. 2:2)—a perspective which is witnessed in Acts 17:1-9—but also that persecution is to be considered the lot of believers (1 Thess. 3:3-4). It would also have been recognised that Jesus, himself, continued to minister in the face of considerable opposition, and in this sense the Thessalonians are imitators not only of Paul, but also of Christ (1 Thess. 1:6).¹⁹

In 1 Thessalonians 2:14, Paul again praises the Thessalonians for their imitation. In this case it is of neither himself nor the Lord, but of other 'Judean churches in Christ Jesus'.²⁰

For you, brethren, became imitators (μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε) of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews (1 Thess. 2:14).

¹⁷C.A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 82, argues that 'Because their conversion had occurred in spite of opposition and distress and they had remained faithful in the face of continuing opposition (cf. 3:1-5), their persistence served as a source of encouragement and inspiration to other groups of believers in their region'. After debating whether the aorist participle is temporal or instrumental, he concludes (80-81) that the elements of both 'persecution' and 'joy' are significant. Cf. also Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 76-77, where his argument considers the punctiliar aspect to the aorist ἐγενήθητε—'This means that the emphasis in imitation must be placed on the way in which they received the word, i.e., with much tribulation, rather than on the fact of reception'.

¹⁸*Contra* A.J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 46-48, who argues that the θλίψις here is the psychological turmoil which follows conversion, rather than external opposition.

¹⁹This opposition which Jesus faced is more explicitly referred to in 1 Thess. 2:15 in terms of his death at the hands of fellow countrymen.

²⁰It is noteworthy that in both 1 Thess. 1:6 and 2:14 the 'imitation' clause is in the indicative mood—it is not that Paul enjoins imitation (using an imperative), as elsewhere in the Pauline corpus; rather the Thessalonians were already proving to be accurate imitators.

The context is once again of suffering. A number of commentators argue, however, that the Thessalonians did not become *conscious* imitators of the Judeans; instead, by chance of circumstance rather than deliberate emulation, there were parallels between the Judean and Thessalonian experiences—namely, both these communities had received persecution at the hands of their fellow countrymen.²¹

Thus, there is much in the letter to confirm that both the preaching and the reception of the gospel took place in the midst of trouble. It is not clear, however, that Paul intended ‘imitation’ to be understood in terms of an accidental or unintentional similarity based on each of the parties equally facing persecution. It is unlikely that, in their attempts to follow an example, the Thessalonians deliberately sought persecution, and such an interpretation is certainly not confirmed by the wider context of the Pauline or Lukan sources.

The third interpretation focuses on the second of the adverbial phrases in 1 Thessalonians 1:6: that is, the imitation lay, neither in the mere reception of the word, nor in the attendant persecution, but in the ‘joy inspired by the Holy Spirit’ which accompanied the reception of the word.²² It seems, however, at the most only implicit from the context that joy was characteristic also of the mission of Paul and Jesus (although Paul does repeatedly describe the Thessalonian believers as his ‘joy’, 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; 3:9). A more compelling case can be made for a further option, which receives greater support from the surrounding content of the epistle.²³

²¹Cf. e.g., D. Stanley, ‘Imitation in Paul’s Letters: Its Significance for his Relationship to Jesus and to His Own Christian Foundations’, in P. Richardson and J.C. Hurd (eds.), *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984) 133; Michaelis, ‘μυμέομαι κτλ.’, 667, says ‘there can be no question of taking their fate (not their conduct) as an example. What is meant is that (through nothing that you have done) the same fate has overtaken you; you have to suffer the same things as they did before’.

²²Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 67, defends this view partly on the basis of word order within the clause. The first prepositional phrase (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ) expresses attendant circumstance, the second (μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου) represents an adverbial complement to the participle, and the separation of the participle from its complement stresses the latter. ²³This ‘fourth’ option is consistent with one of the conclusions drawn by Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 68, as he considers the ‘rhetorical context’ of the statement and notes, ‘The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and colleagues in the way they responded to the word they heard and to the extent they dedicated their lives to the gospel’.

Paul begins by highlighting the nature of his own ministry whilst he was with them in terms of an example for the Thessalonians to observe: the gospel preached to them was 'not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction *just as you know what sort of men we were among you* (καθὼς οἴδατε οἱοὶ ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν)' (1 Thess. 1:5). 'Just as' (καθὼς), often omitted in translation, is an important conjunction which expressly links Paul's work of evangelisation with his conduct among the Thessalonians.²⁴ In the following verse, Paul immediately refers to their imitation, not only of him and his team, but also of the Lord. It may be arguable, then, that it is their imitation of the *lifestyle* of these people, rather than, in a narrower sense, simply the suffering of persecution or the joy inspired by the Holy Spirit which Paul has in mind.²⁵ If this is so, then the Thessalonians had become imitators by responding to the gospel in a way which reflected and was consistent with both Paul's and the Lord's conduct in living and proclaiming that message.²⁶ The probability of this interpretation is further confirmed at a number of points in the surrounding verses where more can be gleaned of Paul's conduct and the Thessalonians' response.

Earl Richard notes that Paul's description of the believers in terms of 'dynamism, dedication, and constancy' (1 Thess. 1:3) highlights 'characteristics of the audience which make them very much like the apostolic missionaries'.²⁷ The statement in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 that 'when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe', is

²⁴Regardless of whether καθὼς is causal or comparative.

²⁵This is not to say that the Thessalonian imitation did not *also* relate to the joy of the Holy Spirit and the persecution. 2 Thess. 1:4-5 reports a steadfastness notwithstanding persecution, and the Thessalonian imitation in persecution referred to in 1 Thess. 2:14 need not be seen as accidental (*cf.* de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 106). It might also be argued that it was the Thessalonians' imitation of the Judean churches which *resulted*, not consisted, in persecution.

²⁶G. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* (SBL; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 190, offers the description, 'Paul embodies the gospel he preaches'.

²⁷Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 68.

a reflection (or imitation) of the similarly high value placed on the word by Paul.²⁸ The repetition of the Holy Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and 1:6 demonstrates a continuity between the manner of proclamation and the manner of reception of the gospel, that is between the example and the imitation.

Similarly, it is not exclusively in their receiving the word, experience of persecution or joy in the Holy Spirit, that the Thessalonians became examples not only 'to all the *believers* in Macedonia and Achaia' (1 Thess. 1:7), but also 'in every place' (1 Thess. 1:8). Paul's phrase 'so that you became an example' (ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον, 1 Thess. 1:7) links the imitation motif of verse 6 with the example motif which continues to the end of the chapter. The Thessalonians' proclamation of the Lord's message, their continuing 'faith in God' (1 Thess. 1:8), their hospitality towards Paul and his team (1 Thess. 1:9), and the complete nature of their conversion (1 Thess. 1:9-10) together constituted an example to believers elsewhere. So, Paul's lifestyle, witnessed to by his handling of the message and his imitation of Christ, is a model to the Thessalonians which is emulated not simply in their initial reception of that word, but also in their ongoing living out and proclamation of the Christian message. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16 Paul records further evidence of the Thessalonians' imitation of his evangelistic zeal, namely their proclamation of the message, despite being faced with opposition, in order that their fellow countrymen 'may be saved'.²⁹

During that initial evangelistic visit, the team had also demonstrated an exemplary quality of selflessness by living among the Thessalonians 'for their sakes (δι' ὑμᾶς)' (1 Thess. 1:5).³⁰ Earl Richard rightly argues: 'Mutual imitation then is based on the model

²⁸J.H. Schutz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1975) 226; Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 190.

²⁹This is reinforced by the confirming statement in 2 Thess. 3:1.

³⁰The omission of ἐν before ὑμῖν in some texts does not materially affect the emphasis here, whether 'toward you' (dative without ἐν) or 'among you' (with ἐν).

offered by the Lord and is defined by its concern for others.³¹ This theme of self-giving is reiterated in 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9, where it is the very lives of the missionaries which are shared, explicitly seen in their readiness to pursue toil and hardship so as not to be an undue burden on the Thessalonian Christians.

Paul also draws attention to other aspects of conduct:³² namely their 'holy, righteous and blameless' living (1 Thess. 2:10), and their 'encouraging, comforting and urging...to live lives worthy of God' (1 Thess. 2:12). It is interesting to note that the goal is not that the Thessalonians should live lives worthy of their founder or teacher (whom they are effectively imitating), but of God. This is consistent with the overarching example which the Thessalonians have in the example of Jesus (1 Thess. 1:6). Best points out that this theme of Paul's action being emulated by the Thessalonians is re-echoed as an injunction later in the letter when Paul urges that the Lord 'make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you (καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς)' (1 Thess. 3:12).

We can, therefore, see in these opening chapters of the letter that Paul was pleased to hear reports of the Thessalonians being imitators of Paul's team, the Judean Christians and the Lord in responding to the message of God with conviction. They had been both good imitators and examples; but Paul continued to remind them of these broader aspects of his life as they grew to maturity: 'Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more' (1 Thess. 4:1).

There is no clear sense that Paul is here using the references to imitation in a manipulative way to his exclusive advantage; indeed

³¹Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 67.

³²De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 112, points out the way in which Paul repeatedly draws their attention in chapter 2 to what they already know of his life: "'For yourselves...know" (vs. 1), "as ye know" (vss. 2, 5, 11), "for ye remember" (vs. 9), "ye are witnesses" (vs. 10)'. Cf. also M.A. Getty, 'The Imitation of Paul in the Letters to the Thessalonians', in R.F. Collins (ed.), *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (BETL; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990) 278, where reference is drawn to the 'many other hortatory features'; and note other references by Paul to his own life (1 Thess. 3:4; 4:1-2, 6, 11; 5:1-2).

these Thessalonians are commended equally for their emulation of models other than Paul.³³ Where there is an exhortation, it is that the believers in Thessalonica ‘live lives worthy of *God*, who calls you into his kingdom and glory’ (1 Thess. 2:12).³⁴ It is the ‘ethical’ element which is paramount, not simply in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 and 2:14, but consistently through the wider context of these chapters.³⁵

2. 2 Thessalonians

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul continues to employ the motif of imitation (2 Thess. 3:7, 9); he continues to illustrate the nature of his lifestyle among them (2 Thess. 3:7-9); and he continues to praise them for aspects of their lifestyle (2 Thess. 1:3, 4; 3:1, 4).³⁶ Paul is even reporting their conduct to others, presumably with the intent that the Thessalonians once again be heralded as examples (‘Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring’, 2 Thess. 1:4; *cf.* 1 Thess. 1:7-9).

In the course of the letter, Paul gives numerous directives (2 Thess. 2:1-3; 3:1, 6, 7, 12-15), but he also alludes to instructions previously given both in person and in writing (2 Thess. 2:5, 15; 3:6, 10).³⁷ It is significant to Paul’s paraenesis, however, that these traditions³⁸ or instructions are reinforced by his behaviour:

³³Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 191, points out ‘Paul’s emphasis throughout the letter on the equality, mutuality, and reciprocity of the relationship between him and his converts’; he also argues that any element which might be construed as boasting is counteracted by careful ‘antidotes’ (218-19).

³⁴*Cf.* also 1 Thess. 4:1.

³⁵Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 95, does note that ‘The mimetic relationship articulated here does not reveal the clearly defined relations of power evident in the other texts involving mimesis’.

³⁶It is not intended in this paper to rehearse the continuing debate over the authenticity of this letter. Its authenticity is presently assumed.

³⁷In 2 Thess. 3:6 he compounds a command formerly given to the community.

³⁸The textual problem within this verse concerns whether the verb is second or third person plural, and does not raise questions as to the source of the traditions.

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us (δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς); we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat anyone's bread without paying, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate us (ἵνα ἑαυτοὺς τύπον δώμεν ὑμῖν εἰς τὸ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς) (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Here the readers are encouraged to imitate the example given by Paul and his team, and in the preceding verse inappropriate models of behaviour are paraded before them.³⁹ It was pointed out with reference to 1 Thessalonians 1:6 that the focus of the imitation was the general conduct of Paul, his companions and the Lord. In this instance their example is detailed more specifically—it concerns both their readiness to work and their resolution not to be a burden on the Thessalonians.⁴⁰ This stance is in contrast to that of some of their fellow believers who had inappropriately chosen unemployment in their imminent expectation of the parousia.⁴¹

In this example we see a parallel with the selflessness which Paul had previously described in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, where he sought to live among the Thessalonians 'for their sake'. Marshall suggests the possibility that the use of the pronoun ἑαυτούς may provide in the Greek a further element of sacrifice: 'in order that we might give to you *ourselves* (ἑαυτούς) as an example for you to imitate us' (2 Thess. 3:9).⁴²

³⁹W. Trilling, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher* (EKK; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980) 145, considers Paul's use of the command to imitate as uncharacteristic here, and this is seen as confirmatory of the pseudonymous origin of this epistle.

⁴⁰This stance is consistent with one adopted by Paul in Corinth, although financial assistance he considered a right; cf. 1 Cor. 9:4; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13. Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 136: 'He thus gave a clear picture of self-sacrificing industry, a picture which had many ramifications regarding selfless devotion to God, the spread of the gospel, and the well-being of one's fellow man'.

⁴¹Best, *Paul and His Converts*, 64.

⁴²I.H. Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983) 222. Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 221, notes the deliberate 'giving' of an example (ἵνα ἑαυτοὺς τύπον δώμεν ὑμῖν).

The subject of work was raised in 1 Thessalonians (2:9; 4:11-12; 5:14).⁴³ It is a matter on which Paul had not only previously taught, but he had also been able to reinforce that teaching with reference to his own example. Here, in 2 Thessalonians, Paul is able to strengthen the impact of his instruction in the same way.⁴⁴

While commentators note that the tone of the injunction here is closer to the imperatival use of the motif in 1 Corinthians and Philippians, than its indicative form in 1 Thessalonians, this must not be confused with an authoritarian tone which would sit uneasily with the selflessness of Paul's actual conduct.⁴⁵ His exhortation that the Thessalonians imitate him without reference here to an *imitatio Christi* does not imply the corollary that he is wanting the Thessalonians to act in a way which elevates him as their domineering founder; but, just as in 1 Thessalonians Paul's aim was that they 'live lives worthy of God' (1 Thess. 2:12), so here his joy is the anticipation that they 'will be counted worthy' of God and his kingdom (2 Thess. 1:5, 11). The desire seems to be that glory will redound to Jesus (2 Thess. 1:12; 2:14), rather than being reflected back on Paul.

3. 1 Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians, Paul twice calls the congregation to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). In both instances, this motif is located within a wider context in which he is reinforcing the content of his teaching by referring to the conduct of his life. In addition to these two explicit

⁴³As Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 222, points out, it is unnecessary to draw from this parallel the conclusion that 2 Thess. is, therefore, pseudonymous.

⁴⁴Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 283, considers that 2 Thess. 3:7-9 'is part of the ethical tradition received from Paul. He and his missionary colleagues had furnished the Thessalonians with an example of self-sufficiency...having the character of an ethical imperative'. πῶς δεῖ is used here (as in 1 Thess. 4:1) 'in the sense of an ethical imperative'.

⁴⁵Although Trilling, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, 145, argues rather that the unqualified use of this motif, with its authoritarian tone, reflects a 'post-Pauline' element, Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 221, and Wanamaker, *op. cit.*, 283, point out that Trilling has overlooked the tone of some of the parallel *mimesis* passages elsewhere in Paul where the sense of the imperative is far from absent.

exhortations to imitate his example, there are further instances within the epistle where the behaviour of other individuals is heralded either for emulation or rejection. Castelli rightly argues that in this letter there is a significant association between the use of the *mimesis* motif and the infamous Corinthian problems of social order and authority.⁴⁶ My evaluation of this association, however, is the inverse of that provided by Castelli.

In 1 Corinthians 4, following a heated outburst, full of irony, Paul's tone abruptly mellows:

I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me (μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε). Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:14-17).

The grounds of Paul's appeal is that he is their father in Christ Jesus. Belleville considers this 'father-child' relationship which Paul has with the community as the legitimation for appealing to imitation.⁴⁷ It is clear from Graeco-Roman literary sources that emulation of one's father was widely lauded. Not untypical is the encouragement of (Pseudo-)Isocrates (5th-4th century B.C.) that Demonicus should follow the example of his father Hipponicus:

But all time would fail us if we should try to recount all his activities. On another occasion I shall set them forth in detail; for the present however, I have produced a sample of the nature of Hipponicus, after whom you should pattern your life as after an

⁴⁶Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 98.

⁴⁷L.L. Belleville, "'Imitate Me, Just as I Imitate Christ': Discipleship in the Corinthian Correspondence", in R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 121-22. She notes that Paul explicitly sends another of his 'sons' to the Corinthians in order to 'remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus' and that Paul's teaching, reflected in his conduct, is normative for *all* the churches with which he has contact—not just those of whom is the father (1 Cor. 4:17).

example (παράδειγμα), regarding his conduct as your law, and striving to imitate and emulate your father's virtue (μιμητὴν δὲ καὶ ζηλωτὴν τῆς πατρῶας ἀρετῆς γιγνόμενον); for it were a shame, when painters represent the beautiful among animals, for children not to imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) the noble among their ancestors ([Pseudo-]Isocrates, *To Demonicus* 4.11).

For Castelli, Paul's insistence that he is their father should be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the authoritative, paternal role as it was understood in Graeco-Roman society.⁴⁸ This patriarchal perspective of the relationship, however, is strongly contested by Witherington, who points out that Paul's emphasis through the letter is to draw a contrast between himself and those models which are typically found in the surrounding society.⁴⁹

The content of the imitation is highly significant. The Corinthian Christian community is one which has adopted many of the secular standards of its age and whose conduct on many accounts is in conflict with that of the gospel which Paul is both preaching and living.⁵⁰ Repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 3-4, Paul draws the attention of the Corinthians to Apollos and himself (1 Cor. 3:4-10; 4:1, 6, 9-13). The explicit contrast which is being made in these chapters is not between Paul and Apollos, however, but between the conduct of these two apostles and that of the Corinthians.

In contrast to the elevation of personalities which characterised the conduct of many of the Corinthian Christians (*cf.* 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4, 21-22), Paul illustrates a perspective of the apostolic life which is considerably less glamorous. It initially seems ironic that in a letter in which he is decrying personality-cults, he nonetheless

⁴⁸Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 100-101, refers to some 'naïve and utopian readings of Paul's use of this image' which 'are no longer justifiable'.

⁴⁹B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 145. *Cf.* also W. Bauder, 'μιμέομαι', *NIDNTT* 1 (1975) 491, who argues *contra* Michaelis: 'Paul's language cannot be reduced to a demand for personal obedience'; *cf.* also Stanley, 'Imitation in Paul's Letters', 141.

⁵⁰See my *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (AGAJU; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

raises himself and Apollos as examples to be imitated.⁵¹ Apollos and Paul are together to be considered not as 'leading personalities', however, but as servants (1 Cor. 3:5, 9; 4:1) who are co-operating in their appointed labour. Imitation of Paul consists not in the boasting or self-congratulation which was endemic to their society, but in being 'put on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena' (1 Cor. 4:9) and being 'the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world' (1 Cor. 4:13). The Corinthians, in contrast, are those who have focused on power and influence. This can be seen in the need for Paul to redress their perspective of themselves (1 Cor. 1:26-29); it is reinforced in Paul's correction of the manipulative use of the secular lawcourts in order to further personal reputations (1 Cor. 6); it is underlined by what may be Paul's refusal to condone the immoral acts of an otherwise influential member of the community (1 Cor. 5). Paul's response to these 'secular' perspectives is not to reassert or defend his own authority (*pace* Fee),⁵² but with great irony to highlight the fallacy in the Corinthian perspective by redefining both his role and that of all apostles as one which is menial. This picture is most eloquently portrayed in the catalogue of deprivations and contrasts recorded in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13.

Paul's paraenesis is then reinforced by reference to his conduct, and that conduct is represented to the Corinthians not only in Paul's words but in the person of Timothy who is sent to 'remind them of my ways in Christ' (1 Cor. 4:17).⁵³ The use of the term 'my ways (τὰς ὁδοὺς μου)' would suggest that, as in 1 Thessalonians, there are broad categories of Paul's life which are worthy of imitation. It should be noted here that Timothy imitates Paul's life in such a way

⁵¹J.A. Brant, 'The Place of *mimesis* in Paul's Thought', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 22 (1993) 293.

⁵²Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 145: 'Paul believes that his role and status are established by God. 1 Corinthians 1-4 is not an *apologia* or an attempt to reestablish a lost authority.'

⁵³E. Larsson, 'μιμέομαι, μιμητής', *EDNT* 2 (1991) 429: 'The imitation refers here not only to the humility of the apostle but rather—as the description in 1 Cor. 4:8-13 implies—to his entire life (which is, to be sure, characterized by humility).'

that he can 'remind' the Corinthians of 'those ways' which are contrasted so diametrically with their ways.

The second explicit exhortation to the Corinthians that they emulate Paul is in 1 Corinthians 11:1: 'Be imitators of me (μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε), as I am of Christ'.⁵⁴ This verse is rightly seen as concluding the preceding section of chapters 8-10, as opposed to opening the new section of chapters 11-14 concerning order when the church gathers. Within these chapters, the overriding theme is one not of claiming or defending rights, but rather of laying them down for the wider benefit of building up the 'weaker' members of the community.⁵⁵ This perspective is to be adopted by those who want to exercise their rights regarding meat which has formerly been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:9-13; 10:23-33), just as it is adopted by Paul on the question of the right to support from those to whom he is ministering (1 Cor. 9:12b-23).

Within 1 Corinthians 10 Paul also draws to the attention of the Corinthians the example of some whom they should not follow: 'Now these things occurred as examples (τύποι) to us' (1 Cor. 10:6); 'Now these things happened to them to serve as an example (τυπικῶς)' (1 Cor. 10:11).⁵⁶ Paul then draws the Corinthians' attention to two more appropriate examples, that of himself and Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

Castelli regards the parallelism here between the *imitatio Christi* and the *imitatio Pauli* as an attempt by Paul to assume the authority of Christ in this situation as his intermediary, and to convey to the congregation that there is a hierarchy ('Community/Paul/Christ/God'). She suggests that Paul is here confusing his identity with that of Christ.⁵⁷ This interpretation is

⁵⁴Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 67, argues that this verse 'provides the background and probably constitutes an expanded form of [1 Thess. 1:6]...for imitation of Paul is in fact imitation of the Lord'.

⁵⁵Belleville, 'Imitate Me, Just as I Imitate Christ', 126.

⁵⁶The context of 3 Jn. 11 may provide a New Testament instance where the *mimesis* motif is used with reference to a bad example, Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9).

⁵⁷Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 112-13. Cf. also Michaelis, 'μιμέομαι κτλ.', 669. For a similarly dubious interpretation of Paul, see S.D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 110, who writes: 'To appeal to one's own exemplary subjection to a conveniently absent authority in order to legitimate the subjection of others is a strategy as ancient as it is suspect'.

inconsistent, however, with the thrust of chapters 8-10.⁵⁸ The juxtaposition of Christ with Paul is not insignificant. Barrett points out that, although Christians should imitate the life of Christ, for these Corinthians they have no direct model or account to which they can turn, and in such circumstances their need is for another life which is itself an imitation of the life of Christ—Paul.⁵⁹ Rather than Paul seeking to reinforce a hierarchy at this point, the intention underlying his exhortations to imitation of himself is to point to the real example of Christ which is the ultimate goal,⁶⁰ in a self-effacing recognition of his own indebtedness to Christ.⁶¹

4. 2 Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians, we see another instance of one church imitating another. The Macedonian church is praised by Paul for their exceptional liberality, and the Corinthians are called to excel in like manner (2 Cor. 8:1-7).⁶² It is noteworthy, however, that it is the 'grace of God' which is credited with the Macedonian generosity (2 Cor. 8:1).⁶³ This comparison between two churches is further enhanced by reminding them of the example of Christ's generosity ('For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for

⁵⁸Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, 142: 'Paul's call to the community to imitate a pattern of humility and servanthood is not for the purpose of "conformity" or "control". It is precisely to protect those who might otherwise be despised or considered socially inferior; in other words, precisely to *protect* the "social deviants" for whom Foucault shows concern.'

⁵⁹Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 116; cf. also W.A. Meeks, 'The Circle of Reference in Pauline Morality', in D.L. Balch, E. Ferguson and W.A. Meeks (eds.), *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 307-308.

⁶⁰Bauder, 'μιμῆομαι', 491.

⁶¹Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, 182.

⁶²In turn the Corinthians' conduct will be used as an example for the Macedonians (2 Cor. 9:2).

⁶³P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 391.

your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich', 2 Cor. 8:9).⁶⁴

In addition to the examples of the Macedonian church and Christ, we see in the letter the example of Paul laid before the Corinthians.⁶⁵ Belleville suggests this is depicted in 2 Corinthians 1:24 where Paul describes how his style of leadership is not domination; and in 2 Corinthians 4:5, where Paul emphasises that he preaches, not himself, but 'Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake'.⁶⁶ Much of the message of 2 Corinthians focuses on servant leadership, primarily exemplified in Jesus.⁶⁷ Indeed, in each of these examples laid before the Corinthians the common element is that Christ is the source and focus.

5. Philippians

Philippians includes two principal models for emulation: that of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11), and that of Paul (Phil. 3:17).⁶⁸ These are supplemented by allusions to other examples.⁶⁹ Importantly, Paul's call to imitation ('Join in imitating me [συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε], brothers, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us [καθὼς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς]', Phil. 3:17) is not a claim to perfection, indeed it is made from

⁶⁴Belleville, 'Imitate Me, Just as I Imitate Christ', 127, argues that 'The primary examples for Christian discipleship in 2 Corinthians are drawn from Jesus' life'; cf. also 2 Cor. 5:14; 10:1.

⁶⁵Best, *Paul and His Converts*, 66: 'Paul makes no explicit reference to imitation of himself in 2 Corinthians though there are constant allusions to his behaviour when he was in Corinth. (1:12, 17; 2:17; 4:2; 7:2; 10:2, 10; 11:5-7; 12:11-13, 17).'

⁶⁶Belleville, 'Imitate Me, Just as I Imitate Christ', 137-38.

⁶⁷Cf. T.B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1996), and S.J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986).

⁶⁸Cf. W.S. Kurz, 'Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ in Philippians 2 and 3', in F.F. Segovia (ed.), *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) argues that in the overall structure of the letter *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Pauli* are drawn up in parallel.

⁶⁹G.F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC; Texas: Word, 1983) 159.

one brother to others.⁷⁰ Rather than expressing conceit, the thrust of the preceding verses (Phil. 3:10-14) demonstrates his awareness that he also is seeking to emulate Christ more closely, and that there are equally other models whom the Philippians could profitably follow (Phil. 3:17).⁷¹ This perspective is strikingly at odds with the interpretation offered by Castelli and Michaelis who see here references to power, control and authority.⁷²

This call to imitation is later expressed again. After listing those qualities which should characterise believers, Paul says, in summary, 'What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do' (Phil. 4:9).⁷³ As Paul has sought in himself to follow the example of Christ, he also can be an example to others.

It is this example of Christ, most elegantly illustrated in the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, which is the subject of the second significant call to imitation in the letter. Here Christ is portrayed as a model for Christians to imitate ('Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus', Phil. 2:5), just as he has been the goal to which Paul has been aiming (Phil. 3:10).⁷⁴ In the pattern which is described, Christ's humility and obedience are specific characteristics which are

⁷⁰G.F. Hawthorne, 'The Imitation of Christ: Philippians', in R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 174-77, notes an ambiguity in Paul's choice of the compound verb (a *hapax legomenon*): 'become fellow imitators of me', or 'become fellow imitators with me'; he also suggests that the 'us' refers not exclusively to himself, but also to the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus which Paul has just outlined.

⁷¹As elsewhere, Paul also highlights for the Philippians those models whom they should not follow (Phil. 3:18-19).

⁷²Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 95-97; Michaelis, 'μιμέομαι κτλ.', 668. Cf. M. Bockmuehl, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1997) 229.

⁷³P.T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 507-508.

⁷⁴L.W. Hurtado, 'Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5-11', in P. Richardson and J.C. Hurd (eds.), *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984) 113-26, and I.H. Marshall, 'The Christ-Hymn in Philippians 2:5-11', *TynB* 19 (1968) 117-19. *Contra* E. Käsemann, 'A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11', in *God and Christ: Existence and Province* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 45-88; R.P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1967); and Michaelis, 'μιμέομαι κτλ.', 669. Cf. also Cruz, *Christological Motives and Motivated Actions*, 376-85, who considers that the whole hymn, not the model of Christ, which should be seen as motivating.

to be emulated, in the vein of the exhortations in Philippians 2:1-4.⁷⁵ Hawthorne rightly argues that Paul is not saying 'Christians should attempt to become second Christs, who quit their heavenly glory, but that they should strive to emulate the attitude and actions of servanthood that marked the character and conduct of the preexistent Christ, who was also the Jesus of history'.⁷⁶ Unlike the frequent exhortations to imitation which are found in Graeco-Roman society and literature, the example of Paul (whether as father or teacher) is given only in the context of his following and directing the church also to follow the far greater example of Christ.⁷⁷

In a letter in which Paul is seeking to counteract the political manoeuvring of the Philippians, he illustrates a very different model of humble service in Christ and then urges his readers also to follow that example.⁷⁸ The use of the imitation motif is most powerfully executed precisely because it is not a power strategy on the part of the author.⁷⁹

6. Ephesians

The imitation motif is used uniquely in Ephesians. Where the object of imitation has elsewhere been Jesus or believers, only here in the New

⁷⁵Stanley, 'Imitation in Paul's Letters', 137. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 203-205, *et al.*, rightly argues that Phil. 2:5 provides a bridge linking the preceding and succeeding verses.

⁷⁶Hawthorne, 'The Imitation of Christ', 169.

⁷⁷Paul has done this himself by taking the same title as Christ, namely δοῦλος (Phil. 1:1; 2:7), and equally by emptying himself of all that was to his advantage (Phil. 2:7; 3:7-8), *cf.* Hawthorne, 'The Imitation of Christ', 172-74, and Kurz, 'Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ'.

⁷⁸For this analysis of *politeia* as a background to the letter, see B.W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 93-104.

⁷⁹Hawthorne, 'The Imitation of Christ', 169: 'Nor is it Paul's point to urge the Philippian believers to pattern their lives after Christ for personal gain, to receive a heavenly accolade, or to be exalted.'

Testament is the object of imitation God (Eph. 5:1).⁸⁰ It is clear that Christians cannot imitate God in everything.⁸¹ This motif is enclosed, however, by verses which draw the readers' attention to the example of Christ:⁸²

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children (γίνεσθε οὖν μιμηταὶ τοῦ θεοῦ). And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 4:32-5:2).

The content of the imitation in these verses is the love and forgiveness which are expressed by Christ; the basis of the imitation is 'as beloved children'.⁸³ A similarity with 1 Corinthians 4:14-16 is here the association of the motif with the imitation between fathers and children; but here the father is God, rather than Paul.⁸⁴ Our imitation of God, the Father, consists, then, in imitation of the forgiving and loving Christ.

⁸⁰But note the similar idea in 1 Jn. 3:2. E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 466, refers to the reluctance in early Judaism to seek imitation of God which only later became more acceptable in Jewish circles under the influence of Greek thought (cf. e.g., Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 4.34). R.A. Wild, "'Be Imitators of God': Discipleship in the Letter to the Ephesians", in F.F. Segovia (ed.), *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 133-36, with regard to the phrase in Eph. 4:24 'clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God (κατὰ θεόν) in true righteousness and holiness' considers that Paul's goal, in discipleship, was 'assimilation to God' following traditional Platonic thought.

⁸¹Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 466.

⁸²A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990) 310, points out the use of οὖν and the repetition of the imperative γίνεσθε as links between Eph. 4:32 and 5:1; although M. Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974) 555 is undecided on the connection.

⁸³C.L. Mitton, *Ephesians* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1973) 175: 'To imitate Jesus is to imitate God. To imitate God is, therefore, a little more accessible to human reach because in Jesus we can see what God is like.' The example of Christ is drawn to the attention of the men in the church in Eph. 5:25. Cf. also A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 310.

⁸⁴L. Kreitzer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Epworth Commentaries; Peterborough: Epworth, 1997) 47, suggests that out of respect for Paul, the writer of this pseudonymous letter, cannot truthfully exhort his readers to imitation of himself.

7. Galatians

The *mimesis* motif is not explicitly found in Galatians, but Paul does use the enigmatic phrase, ‘become as I am, for I also have become as you (γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι καὶ γὼ ὡς ὑμεῖς)’ (Gal. 4:12).⁸⁵ The questions are whether this is a calling to imitation in the sense that we have found elsewhere, and in what sense has Paul become as or imitated the Galatians. Elsewhere the phrase has been ‘be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11:1).⁸⁶

Richard Longenecker argues that the first part of the verse recalls the autobiographical sections of the epistle, and as such is a call to the Galatians to imitate his conduct.⁸⁷ The immediately preceding context, however, is an injunction to forsake bondage either to the Torah or the ‘weak and miserable elemental principles’ (Gal. 4:9). In this vein, Paul has become outside the law, and, as such, like a gentile. The Galatian gentiles should do likewise.⁸⁸ The tone of the succeeding verses is an affectionate appeal to them as brothers and friends, and a fond recollection of how they had formerly offered hospitality to Paul.⁸⁹ Where this call to ‘imitation’ may not fit the pattern that we have found elsewhere, it is noteworthy that the tone in

⁸⁵The 1 Cor. 9:19-23 parallel is significant here.

⁸⁶T. George, *Galatians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 321, suggests the closest parallel is Paul’s statement to King Agrippa as recorded in Acts 26:29: ‘I pray that you...may become what I am’.

⁸⁷R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990) 189; cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 195.

⁸⁸J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1993) 232.

⁸⁹F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1982) 208, suggests there is no sense of personal resentment in this appeal: ‘He is anxious that they should enjoy the same open feelings of friendship and confidence towards him as he cherishes for them.’ He suggests that rather than *imitatio Pauli*, a closer parallel is that of friendship in 2 Cor. 6:11-13. Cf. also H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 222, who notes that friendship is the basis of the appeal, but does not exclude an ‘imitation’ motif here. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 66, detects a mutuality in this verse: ‘Missionary and convert have become brothers and sisters in Christ and so can exhort one another to excel in Christ-like action and behavior’; contra Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 115-16, who uncovers a hierarchical overtone in the use of the father-child relationship which Paul employs.

which the appeal is made, is nonetheless one of appeal to friends, and not the authoritarian demanding of obedience.

8. Romans

When Paul writes to the Romans, with whom he has not had the opportunity to share his life, we predictably find no explicit call to imitation of himself. There is, however, a clear call to imitation of Christ although neither the verb nor the noun is used. In Romans 15:1-3, Paul exhorts:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me' (Rom. 15:1-3).

Paul makes a causal link between his injunction 'not to please ourselves' and the recollection that Jesus set an example in this way (although he offers no specific illustration from Jesus' life, but rather quotes from Ps. 69).⁹⁰ This reference to Jesus' life is continued in Romans 15:5-7, where Paul prays that the Romans may live 'in accordance with Christ Jesus (κατὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν)'⁹¹ and welcome each other 'just as Christ has welcomed you'.⁹² As we have found elsewhere in Paul, the overarching goal is glorification of God, rather than endorsement of Paul's position (Rom. 15:6). The point of this exhortation is to redirect the conduct of the strong when they are not bearing with the weak. As so often in Paul's calls to imitation, it is a call to pleasing or edifying each other, rather than reinforcing the position of the strong (Rom. 15:1-2).

⁹⁰M.B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1-15.13* (JSNT; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 212, 221-25. C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1957) 269, argues with reference to the quotation, 'the example of Christ is more than an example; it belongs to the pattern of revelation'.

⁹¹Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 228, argues that κατὰ here should be understood as 'in accordance with the character or manner of' rather than 'in accordance with the will of'.

⁹²Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 230, suggests this is a welcoming achieved through his death, which cannot be imitated by his followers.

9. The Pastoral Epistles

In the Pastoral epistles, both writer⁹³ and recipients of the correspondence are repeatedly viewed as examples (ὑποτύπωσις, τύπος); and numerous other individuals are named whose example is to be either applauded or shunned.⁹⁴ Paul specifically draws attention to the grounds and purpose of his own example:

But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display (ἐνδείξῃται) the utmost patience, making me an example (πρὸς ὑποτύπωσιν)⁹⁵ to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16).

Paul is proud that the gospel has been entrusted to him (1 Tim. 1:11),⁹⁶ but the tone here and in the surrounding context is far from self-congratulatory; rather it is couched in thankfulness to Christ (1 Tim. 1:12).⁹⁷ Paul recalls his life as a blaspheming, violent, ignorant, sinful and faithless persecutor (1 Tim. 1:13, 15), who amazingly received mercy, love and grace in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 1:14, 16). This act of Christ was a display of ‘unlimited patience’, with the express purpose that others also might believe and receive eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16), and that God be ultimately praised (1 Tim. 1:17).⁹⁸ In contrast to defining an elevated position for himself, Paul has highlighted the depths from which he has come, the fact that his cause was the most undeserving, and that this transformation at the hands of Christ is available to all.⁹⁹ It should also be noted that it is Jesus, in his forbearance, who is setting Paul up as an example—Paul

⁹³Here assumed to be Paul.

⁹⁴Cf. Lois, Eunice, Onesiphorus, Phygelus, Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Alexander, Demas, Mark, (Jannes and Jambres).

⁹⁵Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 197, for discussion of whether ὑποτύπωσις carries the sense of ‘example’.

⁹⁶G.W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 92.

⁹⁷Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 92: ‘The account turns on the mercy shown to Paul and thus focuses on him as an example of God’s mercy.’

⁹⁸Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 197.

⁹⁹Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, 199.

has no grounds on which to seek adulation; and here he does not say 'imitate me'.¹⁰⁰

Paul also directs Timothy's attention to his teaching: 'Follow the pattern (ὑποτύπωσιν) of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 1:13); and 'Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness' (2 Tim. 3:10). Paul's teaching is inextricably linked with his conduct. It was a widespread understanding in Graeco-Roman society that the teacher was to be the embodiment of his teaching.¹⁰¹ The content of Paul's teaching, however, is 'the personal manifestation in Christ of the saving plan of God'.¹⁰²

There is a clear paralleling of example and imitation in two verses in this section: Paul is 'not ashamed' (2 Tim. 1:12) and he calls Timothy also to be 'not ashamed' (2 Tim. 1:8); Paul suffers for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:12), and he calls Timothy also to suffer for the same cause (2 Tim. 1:8).¹⁰³

The verses preceding 2 Timothy 1:13 again draw attention to the saving work of Christ as Paul's motivation in being exemplary (2 Tim. 1:9). His teaching is not his own, but it is the gospel of which he was externally appointed a herald, apostle and teacher (2 Tim. 1:11). It is a message which brings suffering, not personal glorification (2 Tim. 1:12). His grounds of confidence lie not in his own authority, but in the one 'in whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day' (2 Tim. 1:12). The instruction to Timothy is then to guard this most crucial deposit of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:14). The sense throughout is of a far greater authority and far more significant message than is the product of a sophist trying, with all vanity, to ensure the perpetuity of his own brand of philosophy.

¹⁰⁰Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 198.

¹⁰¹Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, considers this at great length.

¹⁰²Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, 203.

¹⁰³Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 199.

In 2 Timothy 3:10 Paul draws Timothy's attention not just to his teaching, but to the example of his life. He depicts his life in stark contrast to that of the godless he has just described at length (2 Tim. 3:1-9).¹⁰⁴ The credit for his conduct is again given to 'the Lord' (2 Tim. 3:11); and Paul affirms that this type of conduct, which any can pursue, is a following of Christ, rather than a following of himself, and consists in persecution rather than honour (2 Tim. 3:12).¹⁰⁵ Paul is also happy to recognise that there are others (presumably referring to Lois and Eunice of 2 Tim. 1:5)¹⁰⁶ who equally exemplify this type of life, and from whom Timothy has learned from his infancy, well before any influence that Paul may have had on the young man (2 Tim. 3:14-15). The loyalty which Paul is seeking is certainly not to himself.¹⁰⁷

Paul also urges both Timothy and Titus to be examples to others: 'Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example (τύπος γίνου) in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity' (1 Tim. 4:12); and 'Show yourself in all respects a model (τύπον) of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity' (Tit. 2:7). In both instances their example is in contrast to the negative example of others (1 Tim. 4:1; Tit. 1:10-16).¹⁰⁸

Paul urges Timothy to communicate the apostle's teaching (1 Tim. 4:6, 11; 6:2), but also that he live in such a way that the young man's godly conduct also be emulated. The motive, again, is not an endorsement of Paul, but of Christ, leading to the salvation of all men (1 Tim. 4:11, 16). This divine purpose can be furthered as effectively by the example of one relatively young as by the long-standing ministry of the apostle (an unexpected perspective in contemporary society) (1 Tim. 4:12). Knight considers that this example would be an

¹⁰⁴Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 438, notes that the contrast is reinforced by the 'twice-repeated "but you"' in 2 Tim. 3:10, 14.

¹⁰⁵Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 440, assumes that Paul's reference to the persecutions is in order to 'remind Timothy of his commitment to the apostle and his ministry', but the context would suggest rather a reminder of the *Lord's* unswerving faithfulness.

¹⁰⁶Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 443, *et al.*

¹⁰⁷*Cf.* 2 Tim. 1:8ff.; 2:3ff.; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 438.

¹⁰⁸Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, 210-11.

'antidote' to the effect of Timothy's age, or 'proof' that his position of leadership is warranted.¹⁰⁹ The only antidote to the age of Timothy (or the sinfulness of Paul), however, is the endorsement of the Saviour (1 Tim. 4:10). The setting of an example is a response to that work of Christ, not in order personally to be recognised, but in order that 'you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim. 4:16). These 'hearers', not Timothy's reputation, will benefit from seeing the young man's progress (1 Tim. 4:15).

Paul makes plain that knowledge of God is always consistent with conduct (Tit. 1:16). He then directs Titus to instruct older men and women, younger men and slaves how to live (Tit. 2:1-10). In conjunction with this instruction, Titus' own life is to be consistent (Tit. 2:7).¹¹⁰ The goal in none of these instances is the reinforcement of the authority of either Paul or Titus (Tit. 2:4-5, 8-10, 14).

Consistent through the Pastoral Epistles, the example of both Paul and his correspondents is within the framework of their relationship to Christ. He is both the grounds and motive of their conduct.¹¹¹

10. Acts 20

An interesting parallel for our study of the imitation motif can be found in Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:18-35).¹¹² As part of a wider study, Walton has found a number of similarities between this speech and 1 Thessalonians on the

¹⁰⁹Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 205, 207.

¹¹⁰L. Goppelt, 'τύπος κτλ', in *TDNT* 8 (1972) 249-50, considers that 'word' and 'life' are linked: 'it is the model which makes an impress because it is moulded by God...The more a life is moulded by the word, the more it becomes τύπος, a model or mould.'

¹¹¹This is one major distinctive between Paul and the Socratics which Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, does not establish.

¹¹²Cf. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul*, 201-205 and S.J. Walton, *Paul in Acts and Epistles: The Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians as a Test Case* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1997) forthcoming as *Leadership and Lifestyle: Luke's Paul, Luke's Jesus and the Paul of 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP).

question of the presentation of Paul as an imitable example of leadership. In the speech, Paul both reminds the elders of his conduct and instructs them to follow suit. Walton notes:

The elders are...to keep alert, remembering how Paul kept alert night and day for three years (v 31). They are to keep watch over themselves (v 28) as Paul kept watch over himself (vv 18b-19). They are to keep watch over the flock (v 28) as Paul kept watch over them (vv 20f, 26f). God's word of grace is available to equip them (v 32) as it equipped Paul (v 24). And Paul draws the speech to a close with an explicit reference to his example 'in all this' (v 35)—an example which he derives from the Lord Jesus.¹¹³

Additionally, Luke records Paul's self-sufficiency through manual labour, and that this conduct is derived from dominical teaching and reiterated to the elders in order that they also might have a selfless attitude to others:

You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example (ὑπέδειξα) that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:34-35).¹¹⁴

Walton further develops this theme of imitation and example between Paul and the Ephesian elders by noting ways in which Luke portrays Paul's leadership as modelled in turn on that of Jesus, as depicted in the related gospel.¹¹⁵ This Lukan perspective of

¹¹³Walton, *Paul in Acts and Epistles*, 99.

¹¹⁴Walton, *Paul in Acts and Epistles*, 103.

¹¹⁵Walton, *Paul in Acts and Epistles*, 121-22, argues that 'Paul's leader/ servant ministry is described in similar terms to those of Jesus and the disciples in Luke's Gospel. Paul exercises a leadership ministry, for he can "summon" the elders to come to meet with him (Acts 20:17). He also exercises his leadership through his teaching ministry (Acts 20:20)'. On 143, he writes: 'Luke presents Paul as both the model of the discipleship lived and taught by Jesus, and the model of leadership in the tradition of Jesus—and this precisely in the context of passing on that leadership to the next generation of leaders in Ephesus'—a view also held by R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 250.

transmission from Jesus to Paul to other leaders is consistent with the picture which we have seen not only in 1 Thessalonians but also elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. It further endorses our view that the imitation motif with reference to the apostle is not being used *by Paul* as a power strategy, but both Luke and Paul seek to portray that, for Paul, the ultimate example is that of Jesus.

III. Conclusions

Having considered the principal imitation and example texts in the Pauline corpus, a number of points emerge. The tension is clearly that 'by holding himself up as an example Paul seems to be contradicting his own command to self-humiliation'.¹¹⁶ At other points, however, 'He stresses the need to imitate Christ...without any reference to himself (Phil. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 15:2-3). Thus the imitation of Christ is primary'.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the fact that Paul also enjoins imitation of other named believers presupposes that he does not consider his, albeit apostolic, role as example unique.

In response to Castelli, it would seem that, if it is possible to recover authorial intent, then a picture which emerges consistently through the Pauline corpus is of one who is using the motif of imitation, not as a power tool in order to bolster authority or to define his social group, but rather as an exhortation that believers ultimately model themselves on Christ.¹¹⁸ This does not deny that Paul is authoritative; rather his authority is exercised in a way which is not egocentric, or for personal gain, thus modelling the Jesus of Philippians 2.

What, then, is Paul's model of leadership? This can be viewed from three perspectives: first, in one sense Paul's model of

¹¹⁶J.A. Brant, 'The Place of *mimesis* in Paul's Thought', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 22 (1993) 285.

¹¹⁷Best, *Paul and his Converts*, 69.

¹¹⁸This perspective of Paul as a manipulator is also propounded by G. Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

leadership (the model to which he turns) is Christ, supremely depicted as the servant of the Philippian Christ-hymn; secondly, Paul's model of leadership (the model or example which he sets) is his own, albeit imperfect, 'imitation of Christ'; and thirdly, Paul's model of leadership (the model which he teaches) is that, in their own imitation of Christ, leaders should direct all believers to imitation of Christ, in contrast to the secular models of Corinth or the *politeia*-dominated practice of the Philippians.

Witherington rightly expresses, 'The glorious conclusion of *mimesis* comes, in Paul's view, at the resurrection of believers, when they are truly conformed to the image of the Son'.¹¹⁹ To that end, Paul's injunction remains important: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1).

¹¹⁹Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 146.